

Magdalena Góra

THE CHANGING NATURE OF FOREIGN POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Just twenty years ago still members of the Warsaw Pact, having been locked against the popular will within the Eastern Bloc, with restrictively limited sovereignty to act in international relations, the countries from Central and Eastern Europe had a long way to go before membership in NATO and the EU. Nowadays active players in the European foreign policy (EFP) and strong promoters of developing common European defence structures, the countries are a fascinating object of analysis. In terms of both international systemic reality and the domestic political setting for formulating foreign policy the CEE countries are in a different world today.

As Chris Brown has observed, foreign policy connects two worlds: the world of domestic bureaucracy and administration and that of international relations (2001). These worlds are of a different nature, but in Central and Eastern Europe both have undergone significant changes. One of the major tasks of the newly independent CEE states was to secure their existence via a redefined and reformulated new foreign policy. A predominantly existential foreign policy was drafted by the CEE states, with the main goal of securing the survival and later wellbeing of each nation in an environment which is ever changing and extremely difficult to predict. The major decisions on the fundamental orientation of foreign policy were, for the first time after the long communist period, based on the national interest. The countries concentrated on such priorities as: preservation of sovereignty, obtaining a guarantee of security in the form of multilateral and bilateral agreements, the creation of favourable conditions for economic development, the establishment of good relations with the neighbouring countries and securing borders, and, finally, the Westernisation and Europeanisation of the countries in the sense of “returning to where we belong” (Kwaśniewski 1999) and integration with Western structures.

The main attempt was to actively search for security guarantees in the West and to strengthen ties with their closest neighbours in the South and East. This was to escape from the dangerous “security vacuum” and join the only functional alliance of the time and the only superpower which had survived – NATO and the USA respectively (Kupiecki 2001; Longhurst and Zaborowski 2007; Kuźniar 2008). Such a shift in for-

foreign policy was motivated by the argument of belonging to Europe and Western civilisation. The political discourse was dominated by the arguments that these countries were “not conforming to but rather re-adopting practices and values that they share but to which they historically contributed” (Fawn 2003: 32). Western structures and especially the European Union were treated as an institutional design which helped to strengthen the position of the nation-state in IR. The final fulfilment of these goals was reached in 1999 when the first group of countries entered NATO and, five years later, when the countries finally became members of the EU.

The geopolitical reality in the CEE region was unfriendly to the young and unstable newly independent states. The region was for centuries an area of rivalry of the regional and great European powers, a battleground for wars and a stage for competing imperialisms. As a result of the historical experience of the Westphalian system, a realist reading of history and international relations dominated in the region, with all its characteristics, such as state-centred analysis of the external world, the sacrosanct character of sovereignty, concentration on self-help, and perceiving security through power-politics in an anarchical environment. Such a perception of the international world was enforced by the brutal experience of World War II and period of communist domination. This kind of reading of international relations also persisted after the breakthrough in 1989, when the region witnessed rapid changes.

On the other hand, the liberal perspective on IR in the case of CEE underlined changes within those countries, especially democratisation and transformation of political systems (Doyle 1986). Through liberal lenses the changes which have been occurring in the region have influenced the perception of the international system as well as the values and principles on which foreign policy was based. As a result these countries immediately adapted their foreign policies to Western principles and priorities. They started participating in global, pan-European and regional multilateral structures and paid much attention to the international organisations. They allied with the EU in the United Nations General Assembly, contributed to the institutionalisation of the CSCE/OSCE and developed regional initiatives such as the Central European Initiative and Visegrad Group.

Another important perspective which is often used to trace the change in foreign policies in the CEE region is the constructivist approach to international relations and foreign policy analysis. This perspective is useful because it shifts the traditional focus from the outcomes of political actions to the more deeply rooted structures of thinking used for the justification of novel actions. As Alexander Wendt wrote, the constructivist approach’s goal is to “show how the social structure of a system makes action possible by constituting actors with certain identities and interests, and material capabilities with certain meanings. (...) how agency and interaction produce and reproduce structures of shared knowledge over time” in the context of international relations (2001: 421). Employing the constructivist perspective to analyse foreign policy of any kind will place collective identity in the centre of the analysis. A nation-state’s foreign policy is based on the shared identity of individuals preserved by the collective memory of the group and state institutions. The process of identity formation creates a basis – and is endogenous – for the process of prefer-

ence formation, even if the latter is pursued strategically (Sedelmeier 2004: 125). Ben Tonra specifies this:

Identity is the context from which national “interests” are divined and developed by policy makers. Identity does not determine foreign policy but it provides the context for the construction and evolution of declared “national interests”. It thus defines the framework from which such a policy ultimately emerges (2001: 31).

Social constructivism focuses on the identity shift in the process of interrelation with the supranational institutions, which is an important aspect of the process in CEE after 1989. It explains the strength and determination with which CEE countries focused on the integration with NATO and the EU. It also explains the stable and high social support for these processes and the consensus in this regard, unusual for fragmented and transforming political systems, among almost all political parties. These goals of foreign policy were perceived as obvious and referring to the belonging to the same civilisation and political culture.

A major factor influencing the shape and structures of foreign policy of the member states of the EU and candidate countries is its Europeanisation (Wong 2007). In broad terms this means that national foreign policy is formulated, implemented and democratically controlled within the European context. Secondly, there is an increasing interconnection between preference formation in the national context and functioning as part of the broader construction of European foreign policy. Europeanisation of foreign policy is a useful analytical concept to capture a change which is understood here as:

(...) a transformation in the way in which national foreign policies are constructed, in the ways in which professional roles are defined and pursued and in the consequent internalisation of norms and expectations arising from a complex system of collective European policy making (Tonra 2000: 229).

Foreign policy is traditionally perceived as a sole competence of an omnipotent, sovereign state. For a long time it was also this area of the state's activity that was covered by secrecy and the lack of public control perceived as a threat to the efficiency of the diplomatic machinery and jeopardising the realisation of the national interest (Sjursen 2007: 1). In the globalised world – especially in the developed North – the distinction between internal and external environment is over time more and more blurred, and the nature of the nation-state is difficult to define. One of the major challenges in contemporary Europe for the nation-states is not only the redefinition of the international challenges, threats and goals but also existence and active participation in the European supranational structures, which, according to Michael Smith, are characterised by being “based on interdependence, confidence-building, communication, common definition of problems, explicit behavioural standards, and the equality of its [EU foreign policy] participants, all of which may encourage a sense of common identity” (2004: 257). Participating in such a novel construction allowed the countries from the CEE region to obtain new capabilities and broaden their scope of activities. Belonging to one of the most advanced organisations in the world in terms of economy, social development and power also requires playing with new cards.

This observation requires some comments on how the process of Europeanisation occurs. As Reuben Wong stresses, “Europeanisation is thus identifiable as a process of change manifested as policy convergence (both top-down and sideways) as well as national policies amplified as EU policy (bottom-up projection)” (2007: 322). Therefore, in analysing the process in the context of CEE countries we can assess how the national foreign policy is adapted to what the EU requires in terms of importance of the European agenda, adjustment to common objectives etc. Various aspects can be researched here, such as an adaptation of the political elites and diplomats and how, among other things, the paradigm of “us” versus “them” has diminished over time (Edwards 2006; Pomorska 2007). Some scholars have focused on specific areas of the EFP and researched, for instance, the Europeanisation of the CEE countries’ development policies (Horký 2010; Lightfoot 2010). On the other hand, the member states – even the new ones – can project their national priorities on the European level. This can either embrace such actions as using the EU as an umbrella or shield supporting against some other actors, which in the CEE region implies relations with Russia, or uploading one’s own interests, such as the case of the Eastern Partnership proposed by Poland and Sweden in 2008 and supported by most of the CEE countries. Europeanisation is also a “mutually constitutive process of change linking the national and European level” (Wong 2007: 330). This is happening through adaptation and socialisation of elites to a functioning in a common structure. The weakness of the concept in the field of foreign policy is also connected with the fact that detecting the scope of domestic change resulting from such processes is rather problematic (Wong 2007).

Three articles selected in this volume deal with three different aspects of changes in the CEE countries. Maria Mälksoo in her article employs a soft, constructive perspective on changes in the perception of foreign policy and international relations, with special attention paid to the Baltic countries. On the one hand she argues that the self-positioning of an actor on the international stage matters and becomes especially visible if the (Foucauldian) discourse-theoretical approach is to be adopted. This allows us to focus on something unique in the process of transformation of international reality. This is the argument that the way we imagine the world and how we talk about it matters. On the other hand, the author employs another useful and innovative approach, that of the securitisation theory by the Copenhagen School of International Relations. For the Copenhagen School:

(...) security is about survival. It is when an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object (traditionally, but not necessarily, the state, incorporating government, territory and society). The special nature of security threats justifies the use of extraordinary measures to tackle them (Buzan et al. 1998: 21).

Moreover, in that model security threats can be used as mobilising rhetoric and create the process of securitisation. This happens through securitising moves (in the form of speech acts) directed to the audience in the context of socially constructed security (Buzan et al. 1998: 24). When we employ this school’s lenses we can perceive changes in the CEE region, in particular the NATO and EU enlargements, as the main

goals and priorities of CEE countries and that, therefore, for the sake of obtaining these goals all other political priorities have been subordinated. Following Atsuko Higashino's (2004) argument, enlargement was securitised in the CEE countries for the sake of further desecuritisation. For Mälksoo the major theme of the Baltic states was to receive recognition of their "return to Europe". This article presents a very interesting insight into how productive the discursive approach can be for researching and assessing the change in foreign policy orientation in general, not only in the CEE context. This also shows how the overarching institutions such as the EU influence and cause changes in foreign policy on a very fundamental level. In other words, for being accepted into the Western club, significant changes must occur on the level not only of political behaviour but also of political consciousness and discourse.

Yet from another theoretical angle, Nathaniel Copsey and Karolina Pomorska look at the post-enlargement period and try to assess how the new actors from CEE can influence European politics. In a way they look at the opposite process of uploading ideas or projecting one's own priorities at the EU level. For this purpose they utilise the various conceptualisations of power of a state to influence EU politics. The case study for this is Polish attempts to initiate a special policy towards Eastern Europe and enforce democratic and pro-Western tendencies in the EU's immediate neighbourhood on the eastern border. The innovative aspect of their research is the conceptualisation of the concept of power in the context of a multinational polity such as the EU. As the discussion on the area of European theories has proved, this is one of the major problems in assessment of the European foreign policy. In order to solve the puzzle, the authors reach for the repertoire of rational choice theories. In particular they based their conceptualisation on a modified version of Moravcsik's liberal inter-governmentalism theory supplied with the ideas developed by Helen Wallace and her attempt to conceptualise the state's influence. This results in an interesting matrix allowing an assessment of the new member states' potential to influence, and is a sobering lesson for scholars and politicians.

Finally, the third selected paper, by Martin Dangerfield, focuses on the third fascinating aspect of changes in the region. The special role of institutionalisation and multilateralism in newly created foreign policies at the beginning of 1990s drew much of the attention of politicians, and was perceived as an antidote to the "security vacuum" created in the region. The tight network of institutional connections between various actors was supposed to make the international environment more secure and predictable. A genuine invention was the Visegrad Group (V4), which served three, and later four, champions of democratic reforms in the region in securing changes and sharing experiences at a difficult moment. Martin Dangerfield, however, asks what the role of this group can be within the EU after enlargement. Can it survive, and what functions – if any – are there for the V4? This is an attempt to perceive the world of international relations as no longer the reality of only states. Institutionalisation of global politics is a fact, and it did not omit the CEE region. Actually, on the contrary, assessing the genuine sympathy in the region for these international institutions shows that they noticed at a very early stage and utilised advantages stemming from their existence, and contributed to their development.

All three articles tell the same story using different approaches and theoretical lenses. All tell us that the reality of international relations has changed in the CEE region, as has the way we research it. Foreign policy is gradually transforming into a “normal” variant where survival – at least for the time being – is guaranteed by several levels of security guarantees. The countries from CEE not only struggle for survival – as they did during the 20th century – but nowadays they have the ability to influence the fate of the continent and even the world if they learn how to use the chances given. It is an optimistic story after all.

References

- Brown, Chris (2001). *Understanding International Relations*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Buzan, Barry, Wæver, Olle, de Wilde, Jaap (1998). *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. London: Lynne Rienner.
- Doyle, Michael W. (1986). Liberalism and World Politics. *American Political Science Review* 80 (4), pp. 1151–1169.
- Edwards, Geoffrey (2006). The New Member States and the Making of EU Foreign Policy. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 11 (2) pp. 143–162.
- Fawn, Rick (2003). Ideology and National Identity in Post-communist Foreign Policies. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 19 (3) pp. 1–43.
- Higashino, Atsuko (2004). For the Sake of Peace and security? The Role of Security in the European Union Enlargement Eastwards. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 39 (4) pp. 347–368.
- Horký, Ondřej (2010). The Europeanisation of Development Policy. Acceptance, Accommodation and Resistance of the Czech Republic. *Discussion Paper*, 18, Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik.
- Kupiecki, Robert (2001). Atlanticism in Post-1989 Polish Foreign Policy. In: Kuźniar, Roman (ed.). *Poland's Security Policy 1989–2000*, Warszawa: Scholar.
- Kuźniar, Roman (2008). *Droga do wolności. Polityka zagraniczna III Rzeczypospolitej*. Warszawa: Scholar.
- Kwaśniewski, Aleksander (1999). Television Address of the President of the Republic of Poland Aleksander Kwaśniewski on the Occasion of the Ratification of the Act of Poland's Accession to NATO, Warsaw, 26 February 1999. In: *Zbiór Dokumentów. Dokumenty z zakresu polityki zagranicznej Polski i stosunków międzynarodowych*, (1–2). Doc. 7. Available at: (<http://78.133.255.100/1999/1-2/7.html>).
- Lightfoot, Simon (2010). The Europeanisation of International Development Policies: The Case of Central and Eastern European States. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62 (2) pp. 329–350.
- Longhurst, Karen and Zaborowski, Marcin (2007). *The New Atlanticist. Poland's Foreign and Security Policy Priorities*. London: Chatham House.
- Pomorska, Karolina (2007). The Impact of Enlargement: Europeanization of Polish Foreign Policy? Tracking Adaptation and Change in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 2 (1) pp. 25–51.
- Sedelmeier, Ulrich (2004). Collective Identity. In: Sjørnsen, Helene, White, Brian and Carlsnaes, Walter (eds.). *Contemporary European Foreign Policy*. London: Sage.
- Sjørnsen, Helene (2007). Integration without Democracy? Three conceptions of European Security Policy in transformation. *RECON Working Papers*, 07/19.

- Smith, Michael E. (2004). *Europe's Foreign and Security Policy: the Institutionalization of Cooperation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tonra, Ben (2000). Denmark and Ireland. In: Manners, Ian and Whitman, Richard (eds.). *The Foreign Policies of European Union Member States*. Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press.
- Tonra, Ben (2001). *Europeanisation of National Foreign Policy. Dutch, Danish and Irish Foreign Policy in the European Union*. Burlington: Ashgate.
- Wendt, Alexander (2001). Constructing International Politics. In: Brown, Michael E., Côté Owen R., Lynn-Jones, Sean M. and Miller, Steven E. (eds.). *Theories of War and Peace*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wong, Reuben (2007). Foreign Policy. In: Graziano, Paolo and Vink, Maarten (eds.). *Europeanisation. New Research Agendas*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.